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REPORT



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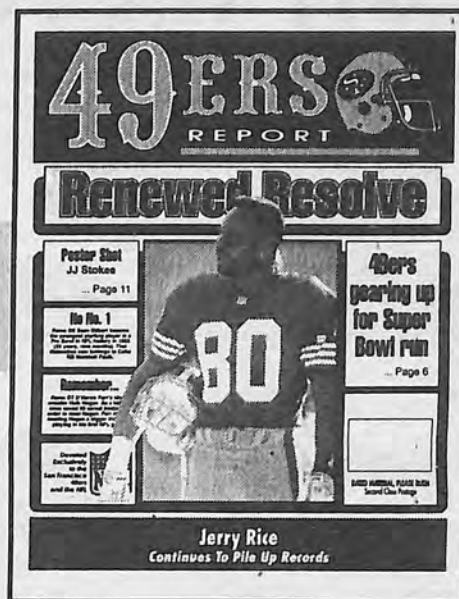
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FROM THE EDITOR



KEVIN
LYNCH

ISSUES HOT OFF THE PRESS

In the psychobabble of the 1990s, the 49ers have "issues." They came out looking like some horrendous monster in the 23-7 drubbing by the Panthers last Sunday.

The first issue is the plight of quarterback Steve Young. He hobbled out of the locker room after the game looking like Festus in the old "Gunsmoke" television series. He was dragging his right leg as if it were wooden.

Undoubtedly, Young was not the same player against the Panthers. Despite two weeks of rest, Young's aching groin and abdominal strain have the potential to become a season-long concern.

Young looked as nifty as a statue. He ran just once and was sacked four times. Some of those he probably could have avoided had he been healthy.

Young downplayed his physical problems.

"No," Young said when asked if his lack of mobility hurt him.

"When I wanted to move, I could move. It just didn't come up that much today."

Young's words could barely be heard because of his stiff upper lip. He had a passable game (24-for-40 passing, 267 yards, a touchdown and an interception), but in order for him to be effective he must have his

runable game, too. In fact, the 49ers' offense is built on it.

When mad professor Bill Walsh was hatching the 49ers' scheme down his basement, he came up with the "X factor." The "X factor" is the ability of his quarterbacks to move and avoid the rush while receivers downfield complete their routes. It's an essential component of the offense.

Last weekend, Young wasn't truly up to the X factor part of the game, particularly after getting crunched by linebacker Kevin Greene on his very first snap.

So now the club must discern just how serious Young's injury is, and what they should do about it. This is where Young's toughness and competitiveness becomes a liability.

Young is like that dismembered knight in the film "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," who keeps getting limbs hacked off but maintains he can fight, professing his amputations as just "flesh wounds."

Young wants to play under any circumstances. In fact, he pitched his helmet upon hearing he wouldn't be going back into the game after the Panthers took a 23-7 lead in the final seconds.

Young isn't to blame. Competitive spirit isn't something that can be tamed. Young will always want to play, and now more than ever.

The six-foot, five-inch shadow Elvis Grbac is lurking right behind him. As has already been said, Grbac's in the last year of his contract and next year will seek a starter's multi-millions. The health of Young will determine whether Grbac will make the money with the 49ers or someone else.

Also, Young wants to make up for all those years he gnawed on a meal made of his own lower lip while sitting behind Joe Montana. Despite those factors, it's up to the 49ers to determine if he can be effective. The team will meditate on that very subject this week, and don't be surprised if Young is either set down or limited in upcoming games until his groin injury fully heals.


Another issue is the 49ers' reaction to being behind. It isn't a situation they're in often, but the comeback victory is essential to a championship season, according to wide receiver Jerry Rice.

"You're not always going to be able to come out and jump on your opponent," Rice said. "You have to be able to come back and be able to win that game."

The 49ers had six games decided by six points or fewer last year, and they lost five of them. The lone victory was against the Saints (24-22 in the opener) when the Niners allowed two scores at the end of the game to make it close.

The last time the 49ers fought from behind to win a game was against the Rams in Los Angeles in 1994. Certainly, there will be opportunities in the next 13 games for the 49ers to make a valiant effort to score at the end of a game and win.

So, those are the 49ers' "issues." Both are thorny problems that will bear watching throughout the season.

And now that they have been fully discussed, anybody for a group hug? 

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**GEORGE
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DON'T WRITE HIM OFF YET

Q. IS YOUR TOP PICK (ISRAEL IFEANYI) GOING TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION THIS YEAR?

A. I think so. Whether or not it's this season remains to be seen. But I think he's going to be an NFL football player and do a good job for us. Some players will come in like Bryant Young and William Floyd and dominate right off the bat. Then, there have been others where it's taken them two or three years to really get into the flow of things.

Q. HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO WAIT?

A. I don't think I'm going to wait beyond next season. It's optimistic for a coach to say next season.

Q. ARE YOU SURPRISED HE HASN'T DEVELOPED FASTER?

A. Not necessarily, no. I'm not to the point of panic or, 'Oh, My God.' Am I surprised? I can't say I'm really surprised. There has been some dramatic improvement.

We're going to play the Falcons and we're going to need a pass rush. It's the time and the type of game in which he could come to the front a little bit more.

Q. WITH NATE SINGLETON NOW OUT, DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH ROOKIE TERRELL OWENS AS THE NO. 3 WIDE RECEIVER?

A. Owens just hasn't had the opportunity to really demonstrate what he can do with the ball in his hands and hasn't been the focal point of any passes. He's going through the learning process. But he's really intent and wants to do well as much as anybody. I'm kind of excited to see him wind up in this situation where he can start getting some passes.

Q. DO YOU HAVE MORE CONFIDENCE IN THE OFFENSIVE LINE?

A. Because of the way they played in the Rams game, yes. But now, though, we're into another (game). So (what they have done so far) doesn't mean a damned thing. We have to do it again.

Q. HAVE YOU HAD ANY REQUESTS FROM STEVE YOUNG OR JERRY RICE TO OPEN UP THE OFFENSE?

A. No, as a matter of fact, I haven't. Neither one has come to me specifically, which in the past they have if there were things

on their minds. But I think everybody's pretty much into what we're trying to do and what we're trying to build. I think they understand the passing game and scoring touchdowns will come.

Q. IS PLAYING DIVISION OPPONENTS TOUGHER BECAUSE YOU PLAY THEM TWICE A YEAR?

A. Yes. Everybody knows one another so well. You develop a sense of the other team. If we play the Saints, certain plays jump into your mind. As a coach you feel that way and as a player you get to know the player you've played in front of. Say you've played in the league for eight years. The other guy from the other teams knows your counters, and the day you were on, and vice versa. It is tough.

Q. IS GARY PLUMMER BACK AT FULL STRENGTH?

A. Yes. He's practicing with the first group. I think the other things that has happened that's a positive in this whole thing is Kevin Mitchell went in and did such a good job. We know we're backed up there with a quality guy. Just like Elvis (Grbac) last year, you kind of find out when you are forced into these situations. It's another good example of a guy staying prepared and taking advantage of his opportunity. I know you want to print that, and tell your fans, if

they stay prepared there are going to be opportunities.

Q. DO YOU HAVE TO ADJUST YOUR PREPARATION DRASTICALLY IF THE OPPONENT'S STARTING QUARTERBACK CAN'T PLAY?

A. Not really. My position is it doesn't matter who plays, you have to be at your best. Because if you're not at your best, and not playing skillfully and energetically, a backup can beat you every bit as much as a starter, especially when you are dealing with a veteran backup. You have to be at your best. It doesn't make any difference.

Q. COULD THE PANTHERS BECOME A BITTER DIVISION RIVAL?

A. I don't know. Who knows? We have a ways to go before we worry about that. It's interesting because some people were really complaining about getting an expansion team in our division. I think we found out in a hurry that expansion teams can be tough if you're not playing well.

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9ER NUGGETS



NEW STADIUM PLAN FULL OF 'PEP'

In a desire to distance himself from the Raiders, 49ers president Carmen Policy said the team planned to institute a "Planned Equity Position" to sell tickets at the 49ers' proposed new stadium.

While he didn't mention numbers the PEP would be a fee for tickets similar to the Raiders' personal seat license (PSL). The PEP would differ in that the one-time fee would entitle the ticket holder to lifetime seat-buying rights.

The Raiders' PSL plan must be renewed every 10 years. Also, Policy said PEPs would probably be sold by a third party, and traded in an organized market.

"(It will) enable the fan to make an investment based on popularity and strength of the team," Policy said.

So the fee for tickets would be lower

than the market demand for 49ers season tickets. Policy sees this as a good deal for the potential buyer.

"I feel confident they (PEP buyers) will be able to get their money back at any time (by selling ticket rights) and get their money back with possibly a premium."

This also differs from the Raiders' plan. Current PSL holders couldn't get the money they paid for their rights if they were sold now.


Of course, the 49ers' ticket rights could go down if the team goes through a prolonged losing streak, as the Raiders just experienced. Policy doesn't anticipate that happening.

When asked what the difference between the Raiders' and the 49ers' ticket rights plans were, Policy said, "Fifteen years of performance, a ready-made market, a ready-made demand."

He also said, "PSLs to me reflect a concept that has suffered severe contamination. I don't want to create the idea that anything we're doing is directly or indirectly related to what they're doing across the bay."

The Raiders can't get either their PSLs and game tickets sold, which might leave the city of Oakland on the hook for \$49 million in stadium renovation costs.

The money for the 49ers' PEPs would help finance the construction of a \$250 million stadium. The stadium proposal will probably come out in January, and is to be put to a vote of San Franciscans in June.

Policy said that every single dime raised from the PEPs will go into the new stadium. 

SAM MANUEL RELEASED

After a lifetime of playing football together, twins Sam and Sean Manuel were finally separated.

The Manuels were drafted in the seventh round by the 49ers last April. Tight end Sean immediately impressed the club. In fact, he was so good the 49ers released Brett Carolan to make room for him.

Linebacker Sam was then released during the final cuts and re-signed to the practice squad. The 49ers released Sam last week to make room for wide receiver Brice Hunter.

"It was a tough thing," Coach George Seifert said. "We didn't want to do it by any means. But we have a full complement of linebackers. We were one short practicing as far as the wide receivers."

Seifert said Manuel might be called back to the practice squad later in the year.

Sixth-round draft choice Stephen Pitts was called to the practice last week. The 49ers released former University of California running back Reynard Rutherford to make room for him.

HANKS SIGNS NEW DEAL

Safety Merton Hanks signed a seven-year, \$22 million contract. Terms of the deal were announced in a joint press conference with Hanks, club president Carmen Policy and Leigh Steinberg, Hanks' agent.

"(Hanks) is everything we look for in a 49ers player," Policy said. The Niners made him a significantly richer man. They wiped out the final year of his contract, which was due to pay him about \$700,000 a year.

Along with a \$4.75 million signing bonus, Hanks will get \$1.1 million this

season. The average pay over the life of the deal is \$3.4 million, making him the highest-paid safety in the game.

Unlike cornerback Eric Davis, the club signed Hanks before he hit the free agent market after the season. Davis went unsigned after 1995 and eventually jumped to the Panthers for a four-year \$11.4 million deal.

Hanks said he's going to start the Hanks Foundation, which will be in conjunction with the 49ers Foundation to provide assistance to Bay Area charities. Hanks has been active in charities over his six-year career.

FLOYD VS. BRADSHAW

Fullback William Floyd has found motivation in the strangest places. Try former Steelers quarterback and current television commentator Terry Bradshaw.

"I'm being motivated by (him)," Floyd said.

Fellow analyst and former 49ers safety Ronnie Lott said the Niners would get a boost when Floyd, who's recovering from a dislocated knee, came off the Physically Unable to Perform list in October. Bradshaw apparently didn't agree.

"Terry made the remark that I'm going to need confidence in myself before I can give to the rest of the team," Floyd said. "I can't wait to be able to say, 'Hey,

look old Super Bowl-winning dude, the reason you won the Super Bowl was because you had Lynn Swann and (John) Stallworth and Franco Harris and a lot of great players around you. And you were throwing off your back foot most of your career."

The motivation seems to be working. Strength and conditioning coach Jerry Attaway said the Floyd could play right now. The only problem Floyd currently has with the surgically repaired right knee is occasional swelling.

Rules of the PUP dictate that Floyd can't practice until next month, and won't be able to come back to the team until after Week 6.

"When I step out on that field, I'm going to ready to go," Floyd said. "I'm hungry."

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A TRIUMPHANT ROY BARKER

Fans must wonder what kind of financial shell game the 49ers are running over there at 4949 Centennial Blvd.

They read how the team is constantly squeezed up against the salary cap. The next thing they read is how they just signed Jerry Rice to a seven-year, \$32 million contract extension, or safety Merton Hanks to a seven-year \$22.4 million deal?

How is this possible? It's all part of sports business in the 1990s and the 49ers do it as well or better than anyone else. It's a major reason they've been able to stay competitive despite imposition of the salary cap in 1992.

To fully understand how the Niners have dealt with the cap, we must first delve into their recent financial history.

THE PAST

Fellow owners used to yelp about Eddie DeBartolo spare-no-expense approach back in the 1980s. They said he was ruining the league's salary structure and pushing payroll to obscene heights.

Indeed, with no real free agency in NFL football and no salary cap, the 49ers spent freely. Recently, club president Carmen Policy harkened back to 1989, when the 49ers were signing players seemingly every day.

"We had a phenomenal team that went to the Super Bowl," he said, "and we were signing players through spring, summer and training camp."

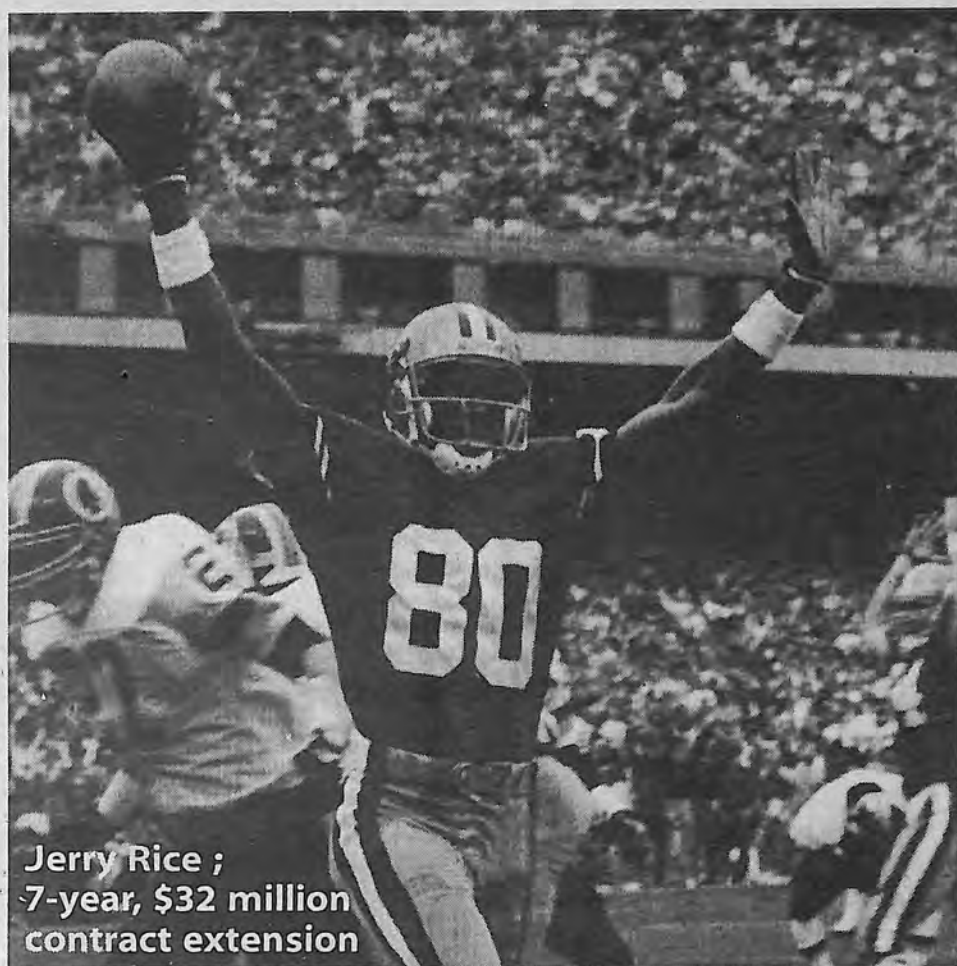
Some of the players were given sizable salaries and hardly played a down. Former Browns cornerback Hanford Dixon and ex-Bills nose tackle Fred Smerlas were perfect examples. Owner Eddie DeBartolo spent wildly. He also plunged the team into debt.

But the privately owned DeBartolo Corp. was so successful with its real estate ventures, money spent on the football team was no big thing. The 1980s was one prolonged party for the DeBartolo Corp. and the Niners. The club won four Super Bowls and was called "Team of the Decade." Plus, the corporation was striking deals and breaking ground on mall construction throughout the United States.

But if the '80s was a party, the '90s was the hangover. The real estate market bottomed out, creditors came after the corporation and the league introduced the salary cap. With bankers soaking up the corporation's liquid assets the 49ers could no longer spend lavishly.

That's when DeBartolo sent for Policy, his close confidant, to be the president of the team.

"Part of my job was to make sure the 49ers became self-sufficient so that would enable the family, no matter what



**Jerry Rice ;
7-year, \$32 million
contract extension**

the circumstances, to maintain ownership well into the 21st century," Policy said recently.

Shortly after Policy moved from Youngstown, Ohio, and became a Bay Area resident, the league imposed the salary cap, which was to take effect in 1993. Under the cap's rules, the 49ers were actually forced to cut their payroll.

"The first thing we did in '92 was recognize we were in big trouble come '93 when the cap hit, unless we got immediate relief," Policy said. "We knew the team would fall apart unless we restructured in '92."

**"We had a phenomenal team that went to the Super Bowl, and we were signing players through spring, summer and training camp."
... Carmen Policy**

In the last 6-8 weeks of that season the club reworked contracts of 10 players, most of them starters. Steve Young, John Taylor, Merton Hanks, Brent Jones and Eric Davis were some of the players who had their contracts

redone so they wouldn't count against the cap.

Without making the move the 49ers probably would have lost several of those players the next year. The Redskins were also far above the salary cap at that time, yet they didn't restructure with same vigor as the 49ers.

In that year the 'Skins were 9-7 and lost to the 49ers in a divisional playoff game. The next year, they lost several of their most talented players and fell to 4-12. They haven't had a winning record since.

By contrast, the 49ers have maintained double-digit victory seasons and won a Super Bowl in 1994.

TODAY

The 49ers have redone dozens of contracts, and doled out millions in contract bonuses since the cap was imposed. Because of it, they will be able to keep the roster stocked with talent. The chief device employed to make room is contract re-structuring. It's a technique generally credited to superagent Leigh Steinberg.

"I stuffed a bunch of lawyers in a room, and didn't feed them until they found out a way to work around the cap," is how Steinberg put it.

What they came up with was the prorated bonus. Say a player has a straight salary of \$3.5 million for one year. His salary cap figure is then \$3.5 million.

In re-structuring, the player instead gets a \$2 million signing bonus, and his salary is reduced to \$1.5 million. Years are then added to the contract (in this case, let's say three), and the \$2 million bonus is spread over the four years at \$500,000 a year. So even though the

player is going to make the same amount (\$2 million in bonus and \$1.5 million in salary) his cap number is reduced to \$2 million because the bonus is spread over four years.

And even though the bonus is spread out, the player collects it in the year of the re-structure.

"It's a winning situation for the player because he gets money up front," said linebacker and Steinberg client Gary Plummer. "It's a winning situation for the club because they get the player for more years."

Usually, the team has to also attach salary along with the prorated bonus for an extension. Nevertheless, it accomplishes the goal of creating room to sign other players.

Players have to be happy where they are playing in order to agree to a contract extension.

"If a guy is on a team he doesn't want to be a part of," said another Steinberg client, safety Tim McDonald, "he doesn't want it because he doesn't want those extra years."

Most 49ers agree to the terms because they like being with the club, which often isn't the case elsewhere. But there are other detractors, particularly from management's side. Whether restructuring a contract, or signing a player to a long-term deal with a big bonus up front, the 49ers are

taking a gamble.

Use defensive end Chris Doleman as an example. He signed a five-year \$12.5 million contract with a \$3.4 million signing bonus spread out through the life of the deal. Doleman will be 35 next month. If he gets hurt, or becomes ineffective, the Niners will be sacrificing cap room in 1997-99 for a player they no longer have.

"You don't want a signing bonus that's going to get a guy here for only one year," Policy said. "We're looking for Chris Doleman for three years."

The 49ers are willing to push some of their cap debt into the future, because their belief is television revenues and money from new stadiums will raise the level of future caps. But, a team could get stuck by stretching several bonuses out too long, thus gobbling up future cap space.

Steve Young, John Taylor, Merton Hanks, Brent Jones and Eric Davis were some of the players who had their contracts redone so they wouldn't count against the cap.





Derek Loville

The 49ers have re-structured the contracts of Harris Barton, Kirk Scrafford, Jesse Sapolu, Brent Jones, Steve Young (several times) Lee Woodall and Plummer, just to name a few.

"That's a danger for every club, not just the 49ers," said agent Jim Steiner, who represents Rice, Elvis Grbac and Chris Dalman. "It could hurt them. But I'm sure they've figured what percentage of contracts they can prorate into the future."

In order to create cap room the 49ers have also asked players for an outright reduction of their contracts. Steinberg said players on the 49ers are more willing to do it than players on other teams.

"Here's part of what happens," Steinberg said. "(The club) builds a paradigm where players will re-negotiate their contracts for each other. That doesn't happen with other teams where you don't have a lot of trust in management."

For example, McDonald accepted a reduction in his contract so the 49ers could create room to sign Deion Sanders in 1994.

"Guys pitched in money for Deion and for some others," Hanks said.

"That helped us win a Super Bowl. I think players understood that. I'm sure there is going to be a time when I need to do something to help get a player and

help with the bottom line. I think every player has that sense."

With such long contracts, Steiner said the players also realize they might have to accept a contract reduction towards the ends of their contracts.

"That's part of the deal," he said.

Also, while no agent wants his player to be underpaid down the line because he's stuck in a long-term deal, they are more willing to lock in the 49ers.

"They play a lot looser with the contract term," Steinberg said.

That means the 49ers are sometimes willing to renegotiate higher if the player is underpaid.

For example, Jerry Rice had his contract redone this summer despite having too years left.

"That's pretty unheard of," Steiner said.

Another reason the team has built trust with players and agents is they aren't chintzy.

"They don't take pride in the 'Bargain,'" Steinberg said, "signing a player for \$2 million when he's really worth \$2.5. If they have the money, they will pay what he's worth."

But, Steiner says that doesn't mean Policy isn't a good negotiator.

"There have been times when I've been ready to explode, but Carmen will charm me," he said. "If you didn't know him, Carmen is the kind of guy who

could take your wallet and you wouldn't even know it was gone."

Also, "if an agent goes into negotiations without leverage, watch out."

"He'll walk all over you," Steiner said.

THE FUTURE

In terms of keeping the club competitive despite cutting the payroll because of the salary cap, Policy has done an incredible job.

Policy now has an even harder task before him, and that's selling San Francisco voters on the idea of a new stadium. Believe it or not, it is intimately connected with the cap.

Policy used the example of the Rams, who moved to St. Louis and are now playing in a new downtown stadium. Policy said the Rams might reap between \$25 and \$30 million a year with money generated from personal seat licenses and ticket sales.

About 60 percent of that money goes to the rest of the teams and raises the salary cap. Say \$15 million goes toward the cap. It means each team gets to raise its cap by \$500,000.

But the rest goes to the Rams, which they can now spend on salaries. Policy argues the teams with new facilities will

have financial edge to stretch themselves further than teams without the new revenues. Policy said the 49ers have been first, second or third in revenue production the last 10 years, but he predicts this year the team will drop to seventh. And once new teams are in Nashville and Cleveland, he sees the 49ers dropping to the middle of the pack.

And because the 49ers must now turn a profit (not like the '80s), he sees them losing their ability to sign and keep top talent.

"The new revenue streams become mandatory, or you literally won't be able to compete," Policy said.

So, now the 49ers are thrust into the position of convincing voters a new stadium is in their best interests. Policy uses a very persuasive argument, but so did the San Francisco Giants with their appeals to dig into the public till to pay for their new ballpark.

If Policy can cut the 49ers payroll and still keep them competitive, as he did in 1993, maybe he can find a way to put a new stadium together. Undoubtedly, he needs to pull another rabbit out of the hat, or in this case, the cap. ○

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Where Are They Now?

BILL RING

In many ways, hard-working Bill Ring exemplified the 49ers' first world championship season, in 1981. Not particularly strong or fast, Ring made the team as a free agent fullback and stayed six seasons. His specialty was special teams and role playing.

YESTERDAY:

Played for the 49ers from 1981-86 ... Appeared in 69 games with nine starts ... Finished career with 733 yards on 183 carries (4.0 yards per carry), and eight touchdowns ... Scored a TD in a playoff game against the Giants in 1981 ... Tried out for the Steelers as a free agent in 1980, but released ... Native of Belmont, Calif., and a graduate of Carlmont High School ... Attended San Mateo Junior College and Brigham Young.

TODAY:

Knowing that any of his six seasons with the Niners might well be his last, Ring began an investment banking career in the off-season of 1983. After retiring in 1987, he was hired full-time by the Wells Fargo Co. He took a leave of absence one year to be a coach with Bill Walsh, but afterward went right back to his chosen field.

"I loved coaching," said Ring by telephone from his downtown San Francisco office, "but this (banking) is my life's work." Ring is now a sales and marketing director for Roberts, Stephens & Co.

ROOKIE YEAR:

Ring has fond memories when he considers the 1981 season, the first for him and the first championship year for the 49ers. "I think if you talk to most players, even the guys who have four Super Bowl rings, they'll say the first one was the best," Ring said.

"We just came out of nowhere." And so did Ring. Injured in training camp, Ring was released after Game 3. "They told me they were looking for a roster spot for me," Ring said. "But I didn't know if it was going to work out."

Two weeks later, Ring got a call. The 49ers wanted him back before playing the heavily favored Cowboys at Candlestick Park.

"I just decided to go all out, because I didn't know if I was going to be around a week later," Ring said.

The strategy worked. Ring made six tackles on special teams and the Niners pounced on the NFL scene by dismantling the Cowboys, 45-14.

"I knew I had to make a ripple in the pond," he said.

He kept that attitude through six seasons with the team.

THE BIG ONE:

Ring's most cherished memory was the Super Bowl XVI, a game the 49ers won 26-21 over the Bengals in Pontiac, Mich. "There was so much electricity in the air," he said. "It was amazing."

One thing he'll never forget is Ronnie Lott and his attempt to block a kick.

"We were rushing up the middle and he said we had to block the kick. I'll never forget the intensity on his face."

Another thing he'll never forget is the coach, Bill Walsh, acting as a bellhop as the team got off the bus after landing in

Detroit. Walsh went up to Ring and asked him if he needed help with a light bag, Ring said "no", and grew irritated when Walsh persisted. Then he realized it was his head coach.

"The bellhop thing was pretty special," Ring said.

BOTH SIDES NOW:

So was coaching. Ring took Walsh's offer to become one of his assistants in the first year of Walsh's second stint at Stanford in the early 1990s. One thing he learned from Walsh was organization.

"It was better than Stanford Business School in preparing me for what I'm doing now," Ring said.

Three months before spring practice that first year, Walsh went to each of his assistants and told them to break practices down to 10-minute segments. He then wanted to know what that particular coach was going to teach his players in each of those 10 minute slots.

"I've tried to apply that in my organization now," Ring said, "but I'm not quite at that level."

OLD TEAM TIES:

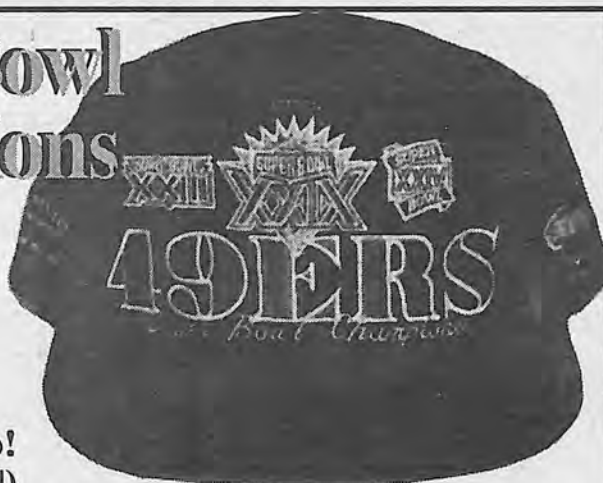
Ring stays fairly close to the 49ers and watches the games, he says, "just like anyone else."

But he does have more an attachment than the average fan.

"It was always a dream come true," Ring said of his six years on the 49ers.

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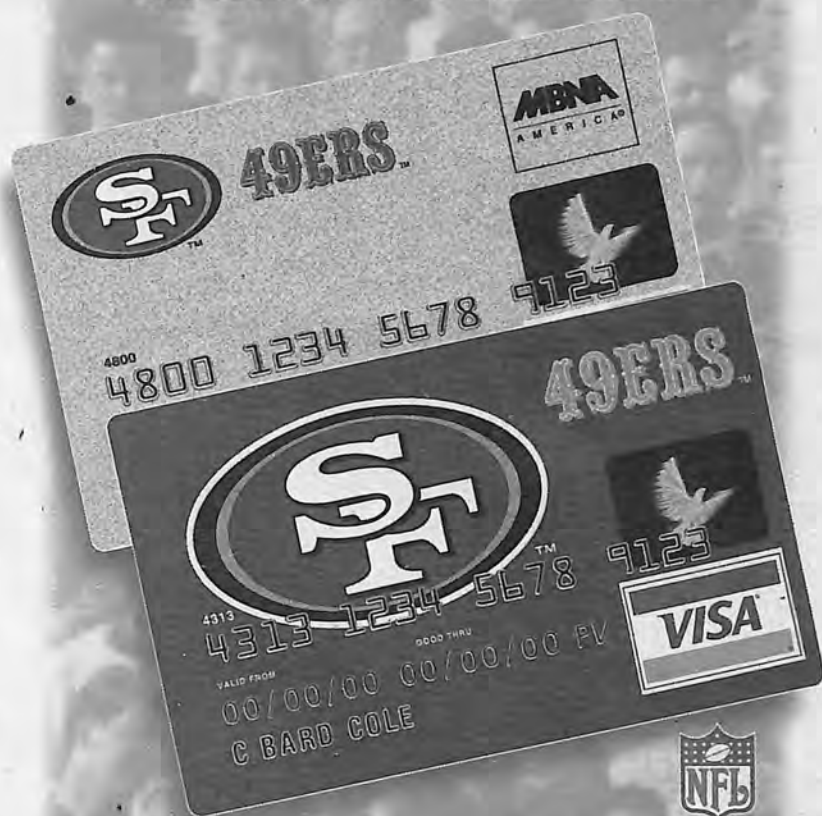
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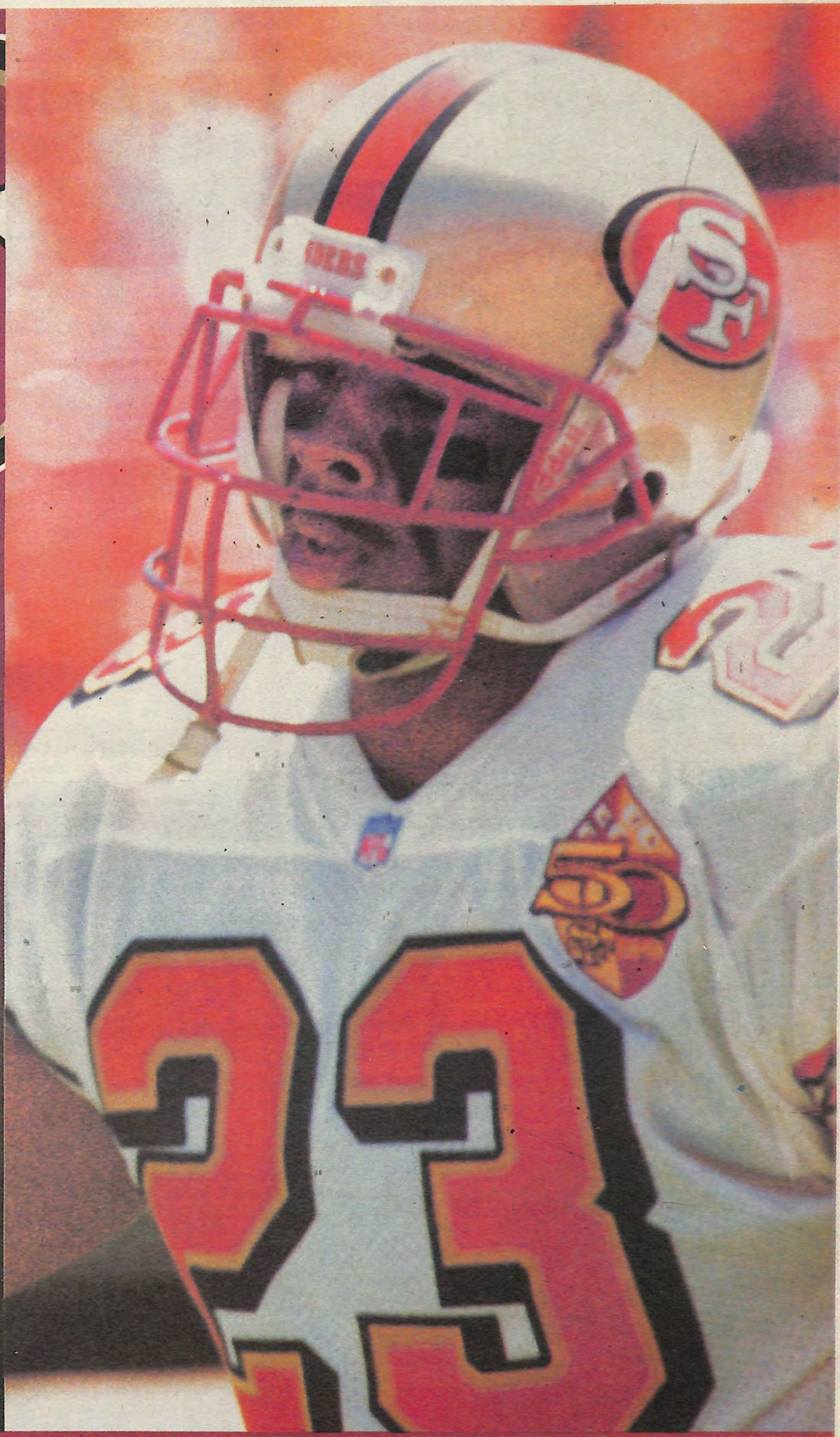
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WESLEY WALLS

6 receptions, 81 yards, 2 touchdowns

PANTHERS

117-48 rushing advantage

49ERS

2-of-11 on third down conversions

By Kevin Lynch

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The 49ers discovered they're like the little girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead. When they're good, they are very, very good.

And when they're bad they get waxed by a second-year team, 23-7.

And that's exactly what happened last Sunday against the Panthers. The loss knocked the Niners from first place in the NFC West, a spot where they had resided for 43 of the last 46 regular-season weeks. Now the 2-1 Niners are looking up at the 3-0 Panthers.

The Panthers grabbed the game and the 49ers by the throat right from the start. They marched downfield and scored when former 49ers tight end Wesley Walls caught a 19-yard touchdown pass from veteran Steve Beuerlein. It was the first time a Niners defense had yielded a touchdown on an opening drive in 28 games.

"Maybe when we saw our defense getting handled, it trickled down to the rest of the team," Coach George Seifert said, groping to try to explain his team's poor showing.

Indeed, coming into the contest, the 49ers were ranked first in the league in defense, and were coming off a 34-0 shutout of the Rams. They were also facing one of the league's worst offenses. The starting quarterback didn't even put on a uniform.

But in the first half the Panthers looked like the Chargers' offense of days of Dan Fouts. They nearly quadrupled the Niners for passing yardage (202-54), and shot out to a 17-0 lead. And they could have had more, but cornerback Marquez Pope intercepted Beuerlein's pass in the end zone.

"(The Panthers were) precise and exacting in picking apart our defense," Seifert said.

They surprised the 49ers slightly by coming out in a three-wide receiver, one-back offense. They proceeded to riddle the defense with short passes.

"They didn't do anything complicated," Pope said.

What they did was out-execute the 49ers. In the Panthers' first drives Beuerlein was 14-of-15 passing for 185 yards and two touchdowns, both to Walls.

Asked if he had ever seen Beuerlein play so well, veteran linebacker Gary Plummer said, "Once, when he was with the Raiders. And the result was the same."

Plummer played nine years for the Chargers before coming to the 49ers in 1994.

The Panthers used short passes to their big wide receivers, who often broke tackles to get downfield. They also depended upon the hard running of rookie Tim Biakabutuka to provide ground support.

Biakabutuka was consistently stopped, but would somehow wriggle away for more yardage. At one point, Biakabutuka disappeared in the pile, popped out the other end and squirted for a 7-yard gain.

"I think some poor tackling hurt us," defensive tackle Bryant Young said.

Young, along with Dana Stubblefield, were supposed to have a huge edge over guards Greg Skrepanak and Frank Garcia and center Curtis Whitley. Television commentator and former Niners linebacker Matt Millen called the performance of those three "pathetic" against the Saints, the Panthers' foe in Week 2.



George Seifert

Against the 49ers, however, it was a different story. "They beat us to the punch," said Young. "You have to give them (the Panthers' interior line) credit for what they did today."

The 49ers greatly helped the Panthers with untimely penalties. On the 49ers' first offensive play, Jerry Rice made a fingertip catch for an apparent 34-yard gain. But the play was called back because Harris Barton was charged with holding.

Later, during the Panthers' first drive, the 49ers had them stopped when Walls dropped a pass on third-and-four that would have given the Panthers a first down at the 49ers' 24. But half of the 49ers' defensive line was guilty of encroachment.

Without those two penalties the 49ers might have been up 7-3, instead of down 14-0.

Ahead 17-0, the Panthers opened the second half in a nickel defense, and the 49ers tried to run them out of it.

"When you start to run the ball, that's exactly what they want you to do," wide receiver Jerry Rice said. "Then they eat up some clock."

It was actually a 44-yard pass that made the game somewhat close. Derek Loville sped right past cornerback Tyrone Poole on a clearing route. When the primary receiver didn't break open, Young scrambled and spied Loville alone in the end zone. It was Young's first touchdown pass in more than 20 quarters.

"Their defense speaks for itself," Seifert said. "We had only one touchdown, and that was on a sandlot play."

7-23

Still, the 49ers had a glimmer of hope. They were down by only 10 points with most of the second half to play. The hope vanished when John Kasay kicked a 35-yard field goal on the ensuing drive.

A blown coverage was the key. The 49ers blitzed on third-and-10, which left Walls open down the middle. His 34-yard reception was the centerpiece of the seven-play march.

Down 20-7, the 49ers still looked like they might pull out a victory. Their offense finally emerged from its first-half hibernation and worked its way slowly down the field again.

The Niners got to the Panthers' 22, facing a fourth-and-seven. That's when the Panthers made the call of the day. Panthers' coaches undoubtedly noticed 49ers kicker Jeff Wilkins hobbled off the field following the second-half kick-off. So the Panthers called a time out with three seconds remaining in the quarter. It forced the 49ers to run one more play at the west end of the Stadium. That's where a stirring wind had kicked up. If the 49ers had been able to change to the other end of the field, the wind could have helped Wilkins' field goal attempt get through the uprights.

With the wind against the 49ers, Seifert decided to go for the first down instead of the field goal.

"I felt as though we had to ignite something," Seifert said. "Our field position had been horrendous all day."

But Young misfired on a pass attempt to J.J. Stokes, and the 49ers were turned away on a 14-play, 6:19 drive.

Still, the 49ers still had a chance in the late going. Young had the offense moving crisply down the field with five and half minutes to play. But on first-and-goal from the 9, the 49ers committed their first turnover of the season.

Young was aiming a pass for wide receiver Terrell Owens, but it was intercepted by safety Brett Maxie. Young expected Owens to flash in front of Maxie. He floated behind him instead.

"We just need to spend more time together," Young said.

The pickoff killed off any chance the Niners had of salvaging victory.

While most players and coaches vowed they didn't take the Panthers too lightly, offensive tackle Steve Wallace had a different view.

"What happens is you sit around and read what your capable of and how good you are for two weeks," Wallace said. "And you take hard work for granted. We have a lot of new faces, and some people might believe we can win games just based on talent. That's not true. We win games based on effort."

Apparently, that effort was lacking last week against the Panthers. As Plummer put it, "That is no expansion team."

WORTH NOTING

STADIUM TOURAGE:

The 49ers played in a stadium they dearly want to see built in San Francisco. Several consultants, including political trouble-shooter Jack Davis, accompanied the Niners to Charlotte and toured Ericsson Stadium the day before the game. Davis shepherded the passage of the San Francisco Giants' ballpark proposal last March. The 49ers want their own stadium proposal in place by January and hope to have it on the June ballot.

FIRST HALF SCORING:

The 49ers came into the game outscoring opponents 36-0 and outgaining them 412-95 in first halves. Prior to Sunday's game the 49ers have given an average of 3.5 points in first halves in their last 18 games. They yielded and average 1.9 points in first quarters over the same stretch.

STREAK BROKEN:

The 49ers hadn't allowed an opponent to score a touchdown on its opening possession in the last 28 games, the longest streak in the NFL. It was broken on Sunday.

ODDS & ENDS:

The Panthers and the Jaguars are the only teams against which WR Jerry Rice hasn't scored a touchdown. The 49ers haven't played the Jaguars in regular-season action... The 49ers have been in first place in the NFC West 42 of the last 45 weeks... This was the first time the 49ers ever played in North Carolina. The two teams played at Clemson Stadium in South Carolina last year... The 49ers have a 59-21-1 road record since 1986, the best in the NFL... Rice has caught at least one pass in 162 games straight. Brent Jones has caught at least one pass in 63 straight games.

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PLAYER OF THE GAME

Marquez Pope

Marquez Pope is 49ers Report Player of the Game, thanks to an interception in the end zone and four tackles. It was the second straight game in which he had an interception. He also had three passes defended.

HOW THEY SCORED

FIRST QUARTER

PANTHERS — Wesley Walls 19-yard pass from Steve Beuerlein (John Kasay kick). Drive: 9 plays, 80 yards. Time of possession: 5:18. Time remaining: 9:42. Key plays: Mark Carrier 11 pass from Beuerlein on third-and-three; Tim Biakabutuka 15 pass from Beuerlein; Winslow Oliver 25 pass from Beuerlein. PANTHERS 7-0.

PANTHERS — Kasay 38-yard field goal. Drive: 5 plays, 45 yards.

Time of possession: 2:43. Time remaining: 4:38. Key play: Willie Green 38 pass from Beuerlein. PANTHERS 10-0.

SECOND QUARTER

PANTHERS — Walls 7-yard pass from Beuerlein. (Kasay kick). Drive: 9 plays, 69 yards. Time of possession: 5:21. Time remaining: 12:49. Key play: Muhsin Muhammad 20 pass from Beuerlein. PANTHERS 17-0.

THIRD QUARTER

49ERS — Derek Loville 44-yard pass from Steve Young (Jeff Wilkins kick). Drive: 6 plays, 71 yards. Time of possession: 2:14. Time remaining: 8:19. Key play: Jerry Rice 14 pass from Young. PANTHERS 17-7.

PANTHERS — Kasay 35-yard field goal. Drive: 7 plays, 37 yards. Time of possession: 2:00. Time remaining: 6:19. Key play: Walls 34 pass from Beuerlein. PANTHERS 20-7.

FOURTH QUARTER

PANTHERS — Kasay 19-yard field goal. Drive: 10 plays, 61 yards. Time of possession: 4:37. Time remaining: :38. Key plays: Oliver 13 pass from Beuerlein on third-and-seven; Anthony Johnson 29 run. PANTHERS 23-7.



Derek Loville



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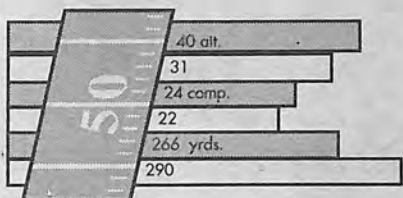
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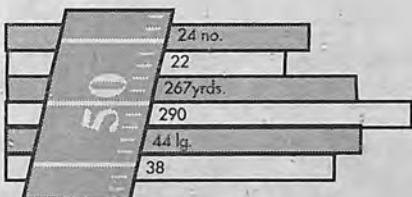
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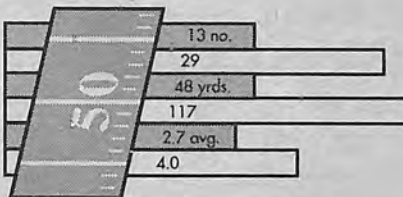
PASSING	Att	Comp	Yds	Sks/Yds	TD	Lg	Int
49ers							
Young	40	24	266	4/15	1	44	1
Total	40	24	266	4/15	1	44	1
Panthers							
Beuerlein	31	22	290	3/18	2	38	1
Total	31	22	290	3/18	2	38	1



RECEIVING	No	Yds	Lg	TD
49ers				
Rice	10	127	21	0
Loville	6	85	44	1
Stokes	4	47	20	0
Owens	2	6	7	0
Vardell	2	2	3	0
Totals	24	267	44	1
Panthers				
Walls	6	81	34	2
Carrier	6	52	17	0
Green	3	64	38	0
Oliver	3	45	25	0
Muhammad	3	36	20	0
Ismail	1	12	12	0
Totals	22	290	38	2



RUSHING	Att	Yds	Avg	Lg	TD
49ers					
Loville	7	20	2.9	5	0
Vardell	3	14	4.7	11	0
Carter	2	7	3.5	7	0
Young	1	7	7.0	7	0
Total	13	48	2.7	11	0
Panthers					
Biakabutuka	20	69	3.5	17	0
Johnson	6	44	7.3	29	0
Oliver	1	6	6.0	6	0
Beuerlein	1	-1	-1.0	-1	0
Muhammad	1	-1	-1.0	-1	0
Total	29	117	4.0	29	0



INTERCEPTIONS	No	Yds	Lg	TD
49ers				
Pope	1	0	0	0
Total	1	0	0	0
Panthers				
Maxie	1	35	35	0
Total	1	35	35	0

KICKOFF RETURNS	No	Yds	Lg	TD
49ers				
Carter	4	81	27	0
Uwaezuoke	1	21	21	0
Total	5	102	27	0
Panthers				
Bates	1	41	41	0
Total	1	41	41	0

PUNTING	No	Yds	Avg	TB	In20	Lg
49ers						
Thompson	7	331	47.3	1	1	54
Total	7	331	47.3	1	1	54
Panthers						
Stark	4	169	42.3	0	1	51
Total	4	169	42.3	0	1	51

PUNT RETURNS	No	FC	Yds	Lg	TD
49ers					
Carter	2	1	6	6	0
Total	4	0	31	9	0
Panthers					
Oliver	5	0	48	15	0
Total	5	0	48	15	0

TEAM STATISTICS	Niners	Panthers
Total First Downs	15	21
By Rushing	2	6
By Penalty	0	3
Third Down Efficiency	2-11-18%	6-13-43%
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2-50%	0-0-0%
Total Net Yards	300	389
Total Offensive Plays	57	63
Avg. Gain Per Offensive Play	5.3	6.2
Net Yards Rushing	48	117
Total Rushing Plays	13	29
Avg. Gain Per Rushing Play	3.7	4.0
Net Yards Passing	252	272
Times Thrown/Yards Lost	4/15	3/18
Gross Yards Passing	267	290
Pass Att.-Comp.-Int.	40-24-1	31-22-1
Avg. Gain Per Passing Play	5.7	8.0
Punts/Average	7-47.3	4-42.3
Had Blocked	0	0
Yards on Punt Returns	6	48
Yards on Kickoff Returns	102	41
Yards on Interception Returns	0	35
Penalties/Yards	7-42	3-20
Fumbles/Lost	0/0	1/0
Touchdowns	1	2
Rushing	0	0
Passing	1	2
Returns	0	0
Extra points Made/Attempted	1/1	2/2
Kicking Made/Attempts	1/1	2/2
Passing Made/Attempts	0/0	0/0
Rushing Made/Attempts	0/0	0/0
Field Goals Made/Attempted	0/0	3/3
Time of Possession	26:34	33:26

SEASON STATS

TEAM STATISTICS	49ers	Opponents
Total First Downs	61	41
By Rushing	23	9
By Passing	20	17
Third Down Made/Att.	13/34	12/41
Third Down Efficiency	29.5	29.3
Fourth Down Made/Att.	3/5	1/2
Fourth Down Efficiency	60.0	50.0
Total Net Yards	989	725
Avg. Per Game	329.7	241.7
Total Offensive Plays	202	172
Avg. Gain Per Offensive Play	4.9	4.2
Net Yards Rushing	334	209
Avg. Per Game	11.3	69.7
Total Rushing Plays	93	63
Net Yards Passing	655	516
Avg. Per Game	218.3	172.0
Sacks/Yards Lost	8/35	10/63
Gross Yards Passing	690	579
Att./Comp.	101/63	99/49
Pct. of Completions	62.4	49.5
Had Intercepted	1	3
Punts/Average	17/45.6	18/39.4
Penalties/Yards	20/170	20/151
Fumbles/Lost	2/1	6/3
Touchdowns	7	3
Rushing	6	0
Passing	1	3
Returns	0	0

SCORING	Name	TDR	TDP	TDRt	PAT	FG	S	2pt	TP
	Wilkins	0	0	0	7	5	0	0	22
	Loville	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	18
	Vardell	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	Rice	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
	Carter	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
	Team	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	4
	Total	6	1	0	7	5	2	0	68
	Opp. Total	0	3	0	2	4	0	1	34

RECEIVING	Name	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	TD
	Rice	22	314	14.3	39	0
	Vardell	12	59	4.9	15	0
	Stokes	11	161	14.6	28	0
	Loville	11	106	9.6	44	1
	Jones	4	33	8.3	12	0
	Owens	2	6	3.0	7	0
	Singleton	1	11	11.0	11	0
	Total	63	690	10.9	44	1
	Opp. Total	49	579	11.8	38	3

RUSHING	Name	Att	Yds	Avg	Lg	TD
	Loville	35	130	3.7	14	2
	Vardell	28	91	3.3	17	2
	Young	11	73	6.6	21	0
	Carter	5	22	4.4	11	1
	Lynn	3	16	5.3	8	0
	Kirby	2	4	2.0	4	0
	Rice	2	5	2.5	3	1
	Grbac	4	-2	-0.5	1	0
	Brohm	3	-5	-1.7	-1	0
	Total	93	334	3.6	21	0
	Opp. Total	63	209	3.3	29	0

PASSING	Name	Att	Comp	Yds	Pct	Avg/Att	TD	%TD	Int	%Int	Lg	Lost/Att
	Young	87	57	604	65.5	6.9	1	1.1	1	1.1	44	8/35
	Grbac	14	6	86	42.9	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	39	0/0
	Total	101	63	690	62.4	6.8	1	0.9	1	0.9	44	8/35
	Opp. Total	99	49	579	49.5	5.8	3	3.0	3	3.0	38	10/63

FIELD GOALS	Name	1-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
	Wilkins	0/0	4/4	1/1	0/1	0/0	5/6
	Total	0/0	4/4	1/1	0/1	0/0	5/6
	Opp. Total	1/1	1/1	2/2	0/0	0/0	4/4

PUNTING	Name	No	Yds	Avg	TB	In20	Lg
	Thompson	17	775	45.6	3	6	57
	Total	17	775	45.6	3	6	57
	Opp. Total	18	710	39.4	2	1	60

PUNT RETURNS	Name	No	FC	Yds	Avg	Lg	TD
	Carter	7	2	42	6.0	9	0
	Singleton	2	0	32	16.0	21	0
	Total	9	2	74	8.2	21	0
	Opp. Total	8	3	64	8.0	15	0

KICKOFF RETURNS	Name	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	TD
	Carter	8	176	22.0	42	0
	Uwaezuoke	1	21	21.0	21	0
	Deese	1	12	12.0	12	0
	Singleton	1	10	10.0	10	0
	Total	11	219	19.9	42	0
	Opp. Total	9	223	24.8	56	0

Sacks: B. Young (2), Brown (2), Doleman (2), Drakeford (1), Woodall (1), McDonald (1), Barker (1).

Special Teams Tackles: Israel (3), Lynn (3), Peterson (1), Price (1), Benefield (1), Bryant (1), Singleton (1), Williams (1), Buckley (1), Kirk (1), Popson (1), Smith (1).

Misc. Tackles: Young (1)

INTERCEPTIONS	Name	No	Yds	Avg
	Pope	2	25	12.5
	McDonald	1	14	14.0
	Total	3	39	13.0
	Opp. Total	1	35	35.0

DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	Name	Tackles	Assists	Total
	Norton	14	3	17
	McDonald	13	1	14
	Doleman	12	1	13
	Hanks	10	3	13
	Pope	12	0	12
	Drakeford	4	5	9
	Mitchell	7	1	8
	Plummer	7	0	7
	Young	5	1	6
	Woodall	5	1	6
	Barker	5	0	5
	Dodge	5	0	5
	Israel	4	0	4
	Brown	3	0	3
	Stubblefield	2	0	2
	Bryant	1	0	1
	Price	1	0	1

1996

STANDINGS

NFL SCHEDULE

AMERICAN FOOTBALL CONFERENCE



AFC

EAST W L PF PA

Colts	3	0	66	44
Dolphins	3	0	84	37
Bills	3	1	56	61
Patriots	2	2	79	66
Jets	0	4	46	101

CENT. W L PF PA

Oilers	2	1	82	60
Steelers	2	1	64	47
Ravens	1	2	49	74
Bengals	1	2	60	68
Jaguars	1	3	79	88

WEST W L PF PA

Chiefs	4	0	91	53
Broncos	3	1	102	66
Chargers	3	1	106	97
Raiders	1	3	68	81
Seahawks	1	3	61	107

BILLS 3-1

Sept. 1 at Giants 23-20 O.T.
Sept. 8 at Patriots 17-10
Sept. 16 at Steelers 6-24
Sept. 22 Cowboys 10-7
Sept. 29 OPEN
Oct. 6 at Colts
Oct. 13 Dolphins
Oct. 20 at Jets
Oct. 27 at Patriots
Nov. 3 Redskins
Nov. 10 at Eagles
Nov. 17 Bengals
Nov. 24 Jets
Dec. 1 at Colts
Dec. 8 at Seahawks
Dec. 16 at Dolphins
Dec. 22 Chiefs

COLTS 3-0

Sept. 1 Cardinals 20-13
Sept. 8 at Jets 21-7
Sept. 15 at Cowboys 25-24
Sept. 23 Dolphins
Sept. 29 OPEN
Oct. 6 at Bills
Oct. 13 Ravens
Oct. 20 at Patriots
Oct. 27 at Redskins
Nov. 3 Chargers
Nov. 10 at Dolphins
Nov. 17 Jets
Nov. 24 at Patriots
Dec. 1 Bills
Dec. 8 Eagles
Dec. 15 at Chiefs
Dec. 22 at Bengals

DOLPHINS 3-0

Sept. 1 Patriots 24-10
Sept. 8 at Cardinals 24-0
Sept. 15 Jets 36-27
Sept. 23 OPEN
Sept. 29 Seahawks
Oct. 6 at Bills
Oct. 13 at Eagles
Oct. 20 Cowboys
Oct. 27 at Patriots
Nov. 3 Colts
Nov. 10 at Oilers
Nov. 17 Steelers
Nov. 24 at Raiders
Dec. 1 Bills
Dec. 8 Giants
Dec. 16 at Bills
Dec. 22 at Jets

JETS 0-4

Sept. 1 at Broncos 6-31
Sept. 8 Colts 7-21
Sept. 15 at Dolphins 27-36
Sept. 22 Giants 6-13
Sept. 29 OPEN
Oct. 6 Raiders
Oct. 13 at Jaguars
Oct. 20 at Cardinals
Oct. 27 OPEN
Nov. 3 Patriots
Nov. 10 at Colts
Nov. 17 at Bills
Nov. 24 Oilers
Dec. 1 at Patriots
Dec. 8 Eagles
Dec. 14 Dolphins
Dec. 22 Dolphins

PATRIOTS 2-2

Sept. 1 at Dolphins 10-24
Sept. 8 at Bills 10-17
Sept. 15 Cardinals 31-0
Sept. 22 Jaguars 28-25 O.T.
Sept. 29 OPEN
Oct. 6 at Ravens
Oct. 13 Redskins
Oct. 20 at Colts
Oct. 27 Bills
Nov. 3 Dolphins
Nov. 10 at Jets
Nov. 17 Broncos
Nov. 24 Colts
Dec. 1 at Chargers
Dec. 8 Jets
Dec. 15 at Cowboys
Dec. 21 at Giants

BENGALS 1-2

Sept. 1 at Rams 16-26
Sept. 8 at Chargers 14-27
Sept. 15 Saints 30-15
Sept. 22 OPEN
Sept. 29 Broncos
Oct. 6 Oilers
Oct. 13 at Steelers
Oct. 20 at 49ers
Oct. 27 Jaguars
Nov. 3 Steelers
Nov. 10 at Ravens
Nov. 17 at Bills
Nov. 24 Falcons
Dec. 1 at Jaguars
Dec. 8 Ravens
Dec. 15 at Oilers
Dec. 22 Colts

JAGUARS 1-3

Sept. 1 Steelers 24-9
Sept. 8 Oilers 27-34
Sept. 15 at Raiders 3-17
Sept. 22 at Patriots 25-28 O.T.
Sept. 29 Panthers
Oct. 6 at Saints
Oct. 13 Jets
Oct. 20 at Rams
Oct. 27 at Bengals
Nov. 3 OPEN
Nov. 10 Ravens
Nov. 17 at Steelers
Nov. 24 at Ravens
Dec. 1 Bengals
Dec. 8 at Oilers
Dec. 15 Seahawks
Dec. 22 Falcons

OILERS 2-1

Sept. 1 Chiefs 19-20
Sept. 8 at Jaguars 19-3
Sept. 15 Ravens 29-13
Sept. 22 OPEN
Sept. 29 at Steelers
Oct. 6 at Bengals
Oct. 13 Falcons
Oct. 20 Steelers
Oct. 27 49ers
Nov. 3 at Seahawks
Nov. 10 at Saints
Nov. 17 Dolphins
Nov. 24 Panthers
Dec. 1 at Jets
Dec. 8 Jaguars
Dec. 15 Bengals
Dec. 22 at Ravens

RAVENS 1-2

Sept. 1 Raiders 19-14
Sept. 8 at Steelers 17-31
Sept. 15 Oilers 13-29
Sept. 22 OPEN
Sept. 29 Saints
Oct. 6 Patriots
Oct. 13 at Colts
Oct. 20 at Broncos
Oct. 27 Rams
Nov. 3 Bengals
Nov. 10 at Jaguars
Nov. 17 at 49ers
Nov. 24 Jaguars
Dec. 1 Steelers
Dec. 8 at Bengals
Dec. 15 at Panthers
Dec. 22 Oilers

STEELERS 2-1

Sept. 1 at Jaguars 9-24
Sept. 8 Ravens 20-30
Sept. 15 Bills 24-6
Sept. 22 OPEN
Sept. 29 Oilers
Oct. 6 at Chiefs
Oct. 13 Bengals
Oct. 20 at Oilers
Oct. 27 Falcons
Nov. 3 Rams
Nov. 10 at Bengals
Nov. 17 Jaguars
Nov. 24 at Dolphins
Dec. 1 at Ravens
Dec. 8 Chargers
Dec. 15 49ers
Dec. 22 at Panthers

BRONCOS 3-1

Sept. 1 Jets 31-6
Sept. 8 at Seahawks 30-20
Sept. 15 Buccaneers 27-23
Sept. 22 at Chiefs 14-17
Sept. 29 at Bengals
Oct. 6 Chargers
Oct. 13 Ravens
Oct. 20 Chiefs
Oct. 27 at Raiders
Nov. 3 Bears
Nov. 10 at Patriots
Nov. 17 at Vikings
Nov. 24 Lions
Dec. 1 Seahawks
Dec. 8 at Packers
Dec. 15 Raiders
Dec. 22 at Chargers

CHARGERS 3-1

Sept. 1 Seahawks 29-7
Sept. 8 Bengals 27-14
Sept. 15 at Packers 10-42
Sept. 22 at Raiders 40-34
Sept. 29 Chiefs
Oct. 6 at Broncos
Oct. 13 OPEN
Oct. 20 Raiders
Oct. 27 at Seahawks
Nov. 3 at Colts
Nov. 10 Lions
Nov. 17 Buccaneers
Nov. 24 at Chiefs
Dec. 1 Patriots
Dec. 8 at Steelers
Dec. 14 at Bears
Dec. 22 Broncos

CHIEFS 4-0

Sept. 1 at Oilers 20-19
Sept. 8 Raiders 19-3
Sept. 15 at Seahawks 35-17
Sept. 22 Broncos 17-14
Sept. 29 at Chargers
Oct. 6 Steelers
Oct. 13 OPEN
Oct. 20 at Seahawks
Oct. 27 at Broncos
Nov. 3 at Vikings
Nov. 10 Packers
Nov. 17 Bears
Nov. 24 Chargers
Dec. 1 at Lions
Dec. 8 at Raiders
Dec. 15 Colts
Dec. 22 at Bills

RAIDERS 1-3

Sept. 1 at Ravens 14-19
Sept. 8 at Chiefs 3-19
Sept. 15 Jaguars 17-3
Sept. 22 Chargers 34-40
Sept. 29 at Bears
Oct. 6 Jets
Oct. 13 Lions
Oct. 20 at Chargers
Oct. 27 OPEN
Nov. 3 Broncos
Nov. 10 at Buccaneers
Nov. 17 Vikings
Nov. 24 at Seahawks
Dec. 1 Dolphins
Dec. 8 Chiefs
Dec. 15 at Broncos
Dec. 22 Seahawks

SEAHAWKS 1-3

Sept. 1 at Chargers 7-29
Sept. 8 Broncos 20-30
Sept. 15 Chiefs 17-35
Sept. 22 at Buccaneers 17-13
Sept. 29 Packers
Oct. 6 at Dolphins
Oct. 13 OPEN
Oct. 20 at Chiefs
Oct. 27 Chargers
Nov. 3 Oilers
Nov. 10 Vikings
Nov. 17 at Lions
Nov. 24 Raiders
Dec. 1 at Broncos
Dec. 8 Bills
Dec. 15 at Jaguars
Dec. 22 at Raiders

NATIONAL FOOTBALL CONFERENCE



NFC

EAST W L PF PA

Eagles	3	1	87	88
Redskins	3	1	72	40
Cowboys	1	3	64	57
Cardinals	1	3	41	89
Giants	1	3	43	87

CENT. W L PF PA

Vikings	4	0	94	65
Packers	3	1	136	56
Lions	2	2	86	63
Bears	1	3	55	71
Buccaneers	0	4	45	99

WEST W L PF PA

Panthers	3	0	74	33
49ers	2	1	68	34
Rams	1	2	36	67
Falcons	0	3	41	85
Saints	0	4	60	107

CARDINALS 1-3

Sept. 1 at Colts 13-20
Sept. 8 Dolphins 0-24
Sept. 15 at Patriots 0-31
Sept. 22 at Saints 28-14
Sept. 29 Rams
Oct. 6 OPEN
Oct. 13 at Cowboys
Oct. 20 Buccaneers
Oct. 27 Jets
Nov. 3 at Giants
Nov. 10 at Redskins
Nov. 17 Giants
Nov. 24 Eagles
Dec. 1 at Vikings
Dec. 8 Cowboys
Dec. 15 Redskins
Dec. 22 at Eagles

COWBOYS 1-3

Sept. 2 at Bears 6-22
Sept. 8 Giants 27-0
Sept. 15 Colts 24-25
Sept. 22 at Bills 7-10
Sept. 29 at Eagles
Oct. 6 OPEN
Oct. 13 Cardinals
Oct. 20 Falcons
Oct. 27 at Dolphins
Nov. 3 Eagles
Nov. 10 at 49ers
Nov. 17 Packers
Nov. 24 at Giants
Nov. 28 Redskins
Dec. 1 at Cardinals
Dec. 8 Patriots
Dec. 15 at Redskins
Dec. 22 Redskins

EAGLES 3-1

Sept. 1 at Redskins 17-14
Sept. 8 Packers 13-9
Sept. 15 Lions 13-39
Sept. 22 at Falcons 17-24
Sept. 29 Cowboys
Oct. 6 OPEN
Oct. 13 at Giants
Oct. 20 Dolphins
Oct. 27 Panthers
Nov. 3 at Cowboys
Nov. 10 Redskins
Nov. 17 at Cardinals
Nov. 24 Giants
Dec. 1 at Colts
Dec. 8 Jets
Dec. 14 Cardinals
Dec. 22 Cardinals

GIANTS 1-3

Sept. 1 Bills 20-23 O.T.
Sept. 8 at Cowboys 9-27
Sept. 15 Redskins 10-31
Sept. 22 at Jets 13-6
Sept. 29 Jets
Oct. 6 OPEN
Oct. 13 Eagles
Oct. 20 at Redskins
Oct. 27 at Lions
Nov. 3 Cardinals
Nov. 10 at Panthers
Nov. 17 at Cardinals
Nov. 24 Cowboys
Dec. 1 at Eagles
Dec. 8 at Dolphins
Dec. 15 Saints
Dec. 21 Patriots

REDSKINS 3-1

Sept. 1 Eagles 14-17
Sept. 8 Bears 10-3
Sept. 15 at Giants 31-10
Sept. 22 at Rams 17-10
Sept. 29 Jets
Oct. 6 OPEN
Oct. 13 at Patriots
Oct. 20 Giants
Oct. 27 Colts
Nov. 3 at Bills
Nov. 10 Cardinals
Nov. 17 at Eagles
Nov. 24 49ers
Nov. 28 at Cowboys
Dec. 1 at Buccaneers
Dec. 8 Cardinals
Dec. 15 Cowboys
Dec. 22 Cowboys

BEARS 1-3

Sept. 2 Cowboys 22-6
Sept. 8 at Redskins 3-10
Sept. 15 Vikings 14-20
Sept. 22 at Lions 16-35
Sept. 29 Raiders
Oct. 6 Packers
Oct. 13 at Saints
Oct. 20 OPEN
Oct. 27 at Vikings
Nov. 3 Buccaneers
Nov. 10 at Broncos
Nov. 17 Chiefs
Nov. 24 Lions
Dec. 1 at Packers
Dec. 8 Rams
Dec. 15 Chargers
Dec. 22 at Buccaneers

BUCS 0-4

Sept. 2 Packers 3-34
Sept. 8 at Lions 6-21
Sept. 15 at Broncos 23-27
Sept. 22 Seahawks 13-17
Sept. 29 OPEN
Oct. 6 Vikings
Oct. 13 Cardinals
Oct. 20 at Packers
Oct. 27 at Dolphins
Nov. 3 Eagles
Nov. 10 at 49ers
Nov. 17 Packers
Nov. 24 at Giants
Nov. 28 Redskins
Dec. 1 at Cardinals
Dec. 8 Patriots
Dec. 15 at Redskins
Dec. 22 Redskins

LIONS 2-2

Sept. 1 at Vikings 13-17
Sept. 8 Buccaneers 21-6
Sept. 15 at Eagles 17-24
Sept. 22 Bears 35-16
Sept. 29 at Buccaneers
Oct. 6 Falcons
Oct. 13 at Raiders
Oct. 20 OPEN
Oct. 27 Giants
Nov. 3 at Packers
Nov. 10 at Chargers
Nov. 17 Seahawks
Nov. 24 Bears
Nov. 28 Chiefs
Dec. 1 Vikings
Dec. 8 Packers
Dec. 15 at 49ers
Dec. 22 at 49ers

PACKERS 3-1

Sept. 1 at Buccaneers 34-3
Sept. 8 Eagles 39-13
Sept. 15 Chargers 42-10
Sept. 22 at Vikings 21-30
Sept. 29 at Seahawks
Oct. 6 at Bears
Oct. 13 49ers
Oct. 20 OPEN
Oct. 27 Buccaneers
Nov. 3 Lions
Nov. 10 at Chiefs
Nov. 17 at Cowboys
Nov. 24 at Rams
Dec. 1 Bears
Dec. 8 Broncos
Dec. 15 at Lions
Dec. 22 Vikings

VIKINGS 4-0

Sept. 1 Lions 17-13
Sept. 8 at Falcons 27-17
Sept. 15 Packers 20-14
Sept. 22 Packers 30-21
Sept. 29 at Giants
Oct. 6 Panthers
Oct. 13 at Buccaneers
Oct. 20 OPEN
Oct. 27 Bears
Nov. 3 Chiefs
Nov. 10 at Seahawks
Nov. 17 at Raiders
Nov. 24 Broncos
Dec. 1 Cardinals
Dec. 8 at Lions
Dec. 15 Buccaneers
Dec. 22 Packers

49ERS 2-1

Sept. 1 Saints 27-11
Sept. 8 Rams 34-0
Sept. 15 OPEN
Sept. 22 at Panthers 7-23
Sept. 29 Falcons
Oct. 6 at Rams
Oct. 13 at Packers
Oct. 20 Bengals
Oct. 27 at Oilers
Nov. 3 at Saints
Nov. 10 Cowboys
Nov. 17 Ravens
Nov. 24 at Redskins
Dec. 2 Falcons
Dec. 8 Panthers
Dec. 15 at Steelers
Dec. 23 Lions

FALCONS 0-3

Sept. 1 at Panthers 6-29
Sept. 8 Vikings 17-23
Sept. 15 OPEN
Sept. 22 Eagles 18-33
Sept. 29 at 49ers
Oct. 6 at Lions
Oct. 13 Oilers
Oct. 20 at Cowboys
Oct. 27 Steelers
Nov. 3 Panthers
Nov. 10 at Rams
Nov. 17 Saints
Nov. 24 at Bengals
Dec. 2 49ers
Dec. 8 at Saints
Dec. 15 Rams
Dec. 22 at Jaguars

PANTHERS 3-0

Sept. 1 Falcons 29-6
Sept. 8 at Saints 22-20
Sept. 15 OPEN
Sept. 22 49ers 23-7
Sept. 29 at Jaguars
Oct. 6 at Vikings
Oct. 13 Rams
Oct. 20 Saints
Oct. 27 at Eagles
Nov. 3 Falcons
Nov. 10 Giants
Nov. 17 at Rams
Nov. 24 at Oilers
Dec. 1 at Buccaneers
Dec. 8 at 49ers
Dec. 15 Ravens
Dec. 22 Steelers

RAMS 1-2

Sept. 1 Bengals 26-16
Sept. 8 at 49ers 0-34
Sept. 15 OPEN
Sept. 22 Redskins 10-17
Sept. 29 49ers
Oct. 6 at Panthers
Oct. 13 Jaguars
Oct. 20 at Ravens
Oct. 27 at Steelers
Nov. 3 Falcons
Nov. 10 Panthers
Nov. 17 Packers
Nov. 24 at Saints
Dec. 1 Panthers
Dec. 8 at Bears
Dec. 15 Falcons
Dec. 21 Saints

SAINTS 0-4

Sept. 1 at 49ers 11-27
Sept. 8 Panthers 20-22
Sept. 15 at Bengals 15-30
Sept. 22 Cardinals 14-28
Sept. 29 Jaguars
Oct. 6 Bears
Oct. 13 at Panthers
Oct. 20 OPEN
Oct. 27 49ers
Nov. 3 Oilers
Nov. 10 at Falcons
Nov. 17 at Buccaneers
Nov. 24 Rams
Dec. 1 Falcons
Dec. 8 at Giants
Dec. 15 Rams
Dec. 21 Rams

49ers

ROSTER AND DEPTH CHART

3	Thompson, Tommy	P
8	Young, Steve	QB
10	Uwaezuoke, Iheanyi	WR
11	Brohm, Jeff	QB
14	Wilkins, Jeff	K
15	Owens, Terrell	WR
18	Grbac, Elvis	QB
20	Loville, Derek	RB
22	Drakeford, Tyrone	CB
23	Pope, Marquez	CB
27	Smith, Frankie	CB
28	Buckley, Curtis	S
29	Lynn, Anthony	RB
31	Israel, Steve	CB
33	Dodge, Dedrick	S
35	Carter, Dexter	RB
36	Hanks, Merton	CB
41	Kirby, Terry	RB
44	Vardell, Tommy	RB
46	McDonald, Tim	S
48	Manuel, Sam	TE
50	Plummer, Gary	LB
51	Norton, Ken	LB
53	Peterson, Tony	LB
54	Woodall, Lee	LB
55	Mitchell, Kevin	LB
56	Doleman, Chris	DE
57	Kirk, Randy	LB
61	Sapolu, Jesse	G
63	Deese, Derrick	G
65	Brown, Ray	G
67	Dalman, Chris	G-C
69	Milstead, Rod	G
71	Price, Daryl	DE
74	Wallace, Steve	T
75	Pollack, Frank	T
76	Scrafford, Kirk	T
77	Hanshaw, Tim	G
78	Brandon, Mike	DE
79	Barton, Harris	T
80	Rice, Jerry	WR
83	Stokes, J.J.	WR
84	Jones, Brent	TE
85	Popson, Ted	TE
88	Singleton, Nate	WR
90	Bryant, Junior	DE
92	Barker, Roy	DE
94	Stubblefield, Dana	DT
95	Ifeanyi, Israel	DE
96	Brown, Dennis	DE
97	Young, Bryant	DT
99	Benefield, Daved	LB

OFFENSE

SE	83-Stokes	88-Singleton
LT	74-Wallace	75-Pollack
LG	65-Brown	69-Deese
C	61-Sapolu	59-Dalman
RG	67-Dalman	63-Deese
RT	79-Barton	77-Hanshaw
TE	84-Jones	85-Popson
WR	80-Rice	88-Singleton
QB	8-Young	18-Grbac
HB	20-Loville	41-Kirby
FB	44-Vardell	29-Lynn

DEFENSE

LE	92-Barker	71-Price
LT	97-Young	96-Brown
RT	94-Stubblefield	90-Bryant
RE	56-Doleman	52-Ifeanyi
LLB	54-Woodall	98-Goss
MLB	51-Norton	53-Peterson
RLB	55-Mitchell	62-Cavallo
LCB	22-Drakeford	31-Israel
RCB	23-Pope	31-Israel
SS	46-McDonald	28-Buckley
FS	36-Hanks	33-Dodge

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	3-Thompson	
K	14-Wilkins	3-Thompson
H	3-Thompson	18-Grbac
C	85-Popson	75-Pollack
PR	35-Carter	89-Thomas
KR	35-Carter	89-Thomas

Game Preview



Falcons at 49ers

It's time for the Falcons, and 49ers fans should remember them.

This is the team that exposed the 49ers' fatal flaws in the regular-season finale last year. For those who don't remember, those flaws included defensive inconsistency, lack of running game and an over-emphasis on Jerry Rice.

Those same problems doomed the Niners in the divisional round of the playoffs, when they were jarred from post-season play by the Packers.

The Niners, of course, took steps in the off-season to remedy those problems. Part of the solution was to lure free agent defensive end Chris Doleman from the Falcons with several million dollars.

Doleman complied and now the Falcons are minus a pass rusher in a defense sorely lacking talent. The good news is the 49ers now have a proven pass rusher.

Doleman has been one reason for the 49ers' defensive dominance this season. The Falcons, meanwhile, continue to have the same strengths and weaknesses they always seem to have. On offense they have more weapons than a nuclear arsenal. On defense they'd have trouble stopping the local cub scout troop from scoring. 🏈



Chris Doleman

When the 49ers have the ball...

The 49ers are probably going to have a ball on offense. They usually do against the porous Falcons defense. The Falcons have been horrid defending the pass over the last few years. In the two games last year Steve Young had 647 yards passing and he averaged 42 passes a contest against the Falcons last year. Wide receiver Jerry Rice had an even better time of it with 23 catches for a whopping 320 yards the two times the clubs played each other. The Falcons have recently played a nickel defense against the 49ers, forcing them to run.

YOUNG VS. FALCONS:

Young has thrown more TD passes against the Falcons in his career than other team (27). He also has more interceptions (12). The Vikings are second on Young's interception list with nine.

When the Falcons have the ball...

The last vestige of the run-and-shoot offense resides in Atlanta. Quarterback Jeff George seems comfortable with the scheme and he has talented targets in Terence Mathis, Eric Metcalf and others. The 49ers have traditionally tried to thwart that offense with six defensive backs and one linebacker, and they have had good success with it. But the 49ers don't have as much depth in the secondary as they would like. In fact, if one cornerback is injured they'll be forced to use Frankie Smith, a player who joined the team just a few weeks ago.

RICE VS. FALCONS:

Rice has been a touchdown machine against the Falcons, the league's all-time touchdown leader has 21 against them. The next closest is the Rams on whom he has scored 17. Rice had an NFL-record five TDs against the Falcons on Oct. 14 1990.

Game Four

DATE: Sunday, Sept. 29
SITE: Candlestick Park
KICKOFF: 1 p.m. (PST)
SURFACE: Grass

TELEVISION: Fox (Channel 2 in Bay Area)
SERIES: 49ers, 36-12-1
1995 MEETINGS: 49ers 41, Falcons 10,
 Sept. 10 at Candlestick Park; Falcons 28, 49ers
 27, Dec. 24 at the Georgia Dome.

Worth Noting

THE LAST TIMES: The 49ers played the Falcons at Candlestick Park early last season, and defeated them 41-10. In that game, QB Steve Young was blasted by Falcons LB Jesse Tuggle while he was trying to run out of bounds. The shot injured Young's shoulder, and the injury would later worsen and cause him to miss five games. The Falcons' 28-27 victory in the season finale secured them the final NFC playoff spot and kept the 49ers from securing homefield advantage for the playoffs.

BY GEORGE: QB Jeff George has been excellent against the rest of the league, but downright awful against the Niners. In four tries, he has never thrown for more than 200 yard against the Niners. He also thrown five interceptions and three touchdowns in those games.

HEBERT TO THE RESCUE: In the last contest, former Niners DE Tim Harris knocked George out of the game in the second quar-

ter with a hard hit. Former Saints QB Bobby Hebert then came on and won the game for the Falcons. Most 49ers defenders said they would rather face George than Hebert, who has more experience.

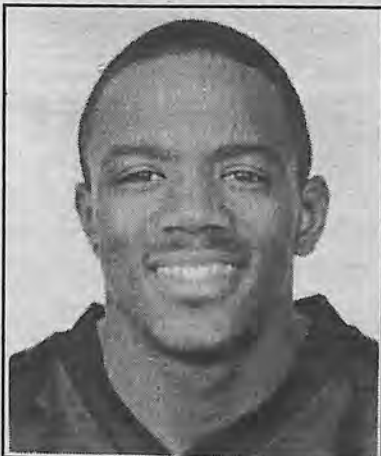
SAME OLD TIM: Former 49ers CB Tim McKyer is in his second stint with the Falcons. It's his fifth different team since leaving the 49ers in 1989. McKyer burned bridges with the Panthers, his last team, when they asked him to be a backup. "Don't be asking me to be a backup to a bunch of backup-caliber players," McKyer said. He is listed as third-string on the Falcons' depth chart.

THE SERIES: The 49ers are 11-5 against the Falcons since 1988 ... The Falcons haven't beaten the 49ers in San Francisco since 1991 ... The Falcons have beaten the 49ers twice with crazy plays at the end of games — once on a Hail Mary pass in Atlanta in '91 and again on a controversial Billy "White Shoes" Johnson TD reception on the last play of a game in '83 ... The Falcons were the last NFC West team to sweep a season series from the 49ers. That was 1991. In the next season, the 49ers won both games a combined score of 97-20.

Key Players

49ers

The Falcons will, no doubt, want to test the improved Niners' running game, making RB Derek Loville and FB Tommy Vardell keys to victory ... A good running game could open things even more for WR Jerry Rice, who has made a habit of devastating the Falcons ... LB Ken Norton is vital to stopping the Falcons' running attack ... CB Steve Israel will be under pressure as the fifth defensive back against the Falcons' run-and-shoot offense.



Darnell Walker

Falcons

Pressure will once again fall on Falcons CBs Anthony Phillips and Darnell Walker as they try to keep up with Jerry Rice and J.J. Stokes ... One of the Falcons best offensive players is former Stanford OT Bob Whitfield. He will be matched against former Falcons DE Chris Doleman ... RB Jamal Anderson has been outstanding, and each week he grabs more playing time from veteran Craig "Ironhead" Heyward. Anderson has more speed than the husky Heyward ... WR Eric Metcalf had a huge season for the Falcons last year and is tough to contain ... K Morten Andersen has won 23 games on last-second field goals including one against the Niners in '93 when he was with the Saints.



Tommy Vardell

Falcons

ROSTER AND DEPTH CHART

1	George, Jeff	QB
3	Hebert, Bobby	QB
4	Stryzinski, Dan	P
5	Andersen, Morten	K
21	Metcalf, Eric	RB
22	McKyer, Tim	CB
24	Bates, Patrick	S
25	Bush, Devin	S
26	Phillips, Anthony	CB
27	Edwards, Brad	S
28	McGill, Lenny	CB
29	Riddick, Louis	S
32	Anderson, Jamal	RB
33	Huntley, Richard	RB
34	Heyward, Craig	RB
37	Odomes, Nathaniel	CB
37	Shelley, Elbert	S
41	Coleman, Lincoln	RB
43	Bolden, Juran	CB
45	Walker, Darnell	CB
50	George, Ron	LB
51	Brandon, David	LB
52	Sauer, Craig	LB
56	Fields, Scott	LB
57	Matthews, Clay	DE
58	Tuggle, Jessie	LB
59	Styles, Lorenzo	LB
61	Tobeck, Robbie	G-C
62	Richards, David	G
64	Pahukoa, Jeff	G-T
65	Fortin, Roman	C
67	Gardner, Moe	DT
69	Williams, Gene	G-T
70	Whitfield, Bob	T
72	Zandofsky, Mike	G
73	Brooks, Ethan	T
76	Davis, Antone	T
77	Willig, Matt	T-G
80	Brown, Tyrone	WR
81	Mathis, Terance	WR
84	Scott, Freddie	WR
85	Preston, Roell	WR
86	Lyons, Mitch	TE
87	Emanuel, Bert	WR
88	LeBel, Harper	TE
89	Birden, J.J.	WR
90	Smith, Chuck	DE
91	Burrough, John	DT
92	Archambeau, Lester	DE
93	Owens, Dan	DT
94	Dronett, Shane	DE
97	Bennett, Cornelius	LB
98	Hall, Travis	DE

OFFENSE

WR	89 Birden	80 Brown
WR	81 Mathis	84 Scott
LT	70 Whitfield	76 Davis
LG	61 Tobeck	77 Willig
C	65 Forin	61 Tobeck
RG	64 Pahukoa	72 Zandofsky
RT	62 Richards	76 Davis
WR	21 Metcalf	16 Scott
WR	87 Emanuel	85 Preston
QB	1 George	3 Hebert
RB	32 Anderson	34 Heyward

DEFENSE

LE	92 Archambeau	91 Burrough
LT	98 Hall	94 Dronett
RT	67 Gardner	93 Owens
RE	90 Smith	57 Matthews
LLB	97 Bennett	51 Brandon
MLB	58 Tuggle	59 Styles
RLB	50 George	52 Sauer
LCB	26 Phillips	44 Johnson
RCB	45 Walker	28 McGill
SS	25 Bush	29 Riddick
FS	24 Bates	27 Edwards

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	4 Stryzinski	
K	5 Anderson	
KO	5 Anderson	
H	4 Stryzinski	86 Lyons
PR	21 Metcalf	85 Preston
KOR	21 Metcalf	32 Anderson
PC	88 Le Bel	65 Fortin
KC	88 Le Bel	65 Fortin

LaFleur Is A Blooming Talent

The Kiper Korner

By Mel Kiper Jr.

This week I am providing a thumbnail sketch of the blue-chip TIGHT END prospects available for the 1997 NFL Draft. Next week we'll have a jam-packed report, covering the OFFENSIVE TACKLES, GUARDS, and CENTERS

1. DAVID LAFLEUR, 6-6 1/2, 270, Louisiana State — Although things improved late last season and in 1996, the quarterback situation at LSU has been shaky to say the least during much of LaFleur's tenure, but he's still managed to make his mark as one of the top combination pass receiving-blocking tight ends to come down the pike in recent years. LaFleur has carried a high grade dating back to his high school days in Louisiana when he was a heralded recruit after starring in football, basketball and track. This kid has the physical skills to take over games, while also accentuating the offensive line with his ability to move defenders off the line of scrimmage. LaFleur is a better overall prospect than Kyle Brady (Penn State 1995) so don't be surprised if you hear his name called within the first 5-8 selections on Round 1.

2. DAMON JONES, 6-5, 268, Southern Illinois — Although still an unknown to most fans, Jones has been catching the eye of the NFL scouts since he transferred from Michigan following the 1993 season. Jones has no problem getting off the line and setting up in the hook zones, while also possessing the quickness to threaten the deep middle area. Physically, he's similar to LaFleur, with the key difference being level of competition. That's why for Jones, the post-season all-star games will be the key determining factor as to just how high up on the first day (Rounds 1-3) he's chosen.

3. ITULA MILI, 6-3, 251, Brigham Young — Qualifies as a major league motion TE or H-back in the NFL — able to catch, run, and block with the best of them and ranking as one of the finest athletes in Cougars history. Mili effortlessly pulls in even the toughest of receptions, then uses his agility and raw speed to do serious damage after the catch. He can finesse defenders with a hesitation move, or utilize sheer power to take on defensive backs or linebackers when the situation presents itself. You might see Mili slide a little farther in the draft, but that's only because he won't be labeled a true tight end prospect.

4. BRYAN JENNINGS, 6-3 1/2, 248, Virginia Tech — With Bryan Still taking his speed and big-play ability to the NFL, the Hokies have been relying heavily on Jennings early in the 1996 campaign. Jennings has the knack for shielding defenders from the ball in a crowd, showing

a better feel for reading coverages and locating the weak areas in a zone. By the middle-to-later portion of the season, I expect Jennings to be one key reason Tech quarterback Jim Druckenmiller has made a quantum leap up the draft board.

5. PETE CHRYPLEWICZ, 6-4, 255, Notre Dame — Could have entered the '96 draft, where he would have likely figured as a fifth- or sixth-round selection. By returning for his fifth year of eligibility, Chryplewicz gave himself the chance to significantly enhance his rating, while becoming more of a focal point in the offense. I have to temper my enthusiasm because we can't forget Lou Holtz uses tight ends primarily as extra tackles. Chryplewicz engulfs the football, shows power and determination in the open field, and brings a confident, hard-nosed approach to the squad.

6. O.J. SANTIAGO, 6-6 1/2, 265, Kent State — Ranks right with Mili in terms of sheer athletic ability, and will definitely be one of the top physical specimens to come out of the Mid-America Conference in quite some time. Because this is the third straight year the tight end position has been far above average in quality and depth, most NFL clubs have been able to solve problems at that spot. This means that in order for a tight end to figure as a first-day selection this year, you will have to rank as one of the top 3-5 available, or figure to be a major bargain on Rounds 4-7.

7. KRIS MANGUM, 6-4, 243, Mississippi — Has really settled in as a top-drawer tight end after beginning his college career at Alabama. Mangum has added weight and muscle since joining the Rebels, without losing any quickness or speed. In fact, Mangum seems more agile, with better body control than he showed as a sophomore. He adjusts well to poorly thrown passes, always extending his hands to pull in the reception. This year Mangum wants the ball thrown his way on third down, giving some indications his final grade could rival that of former Ole Miss star Wesley Walls.

8. MATT LEPSIS, 6-4 1/2, 265, Colorado — Powerful athlete who made the switch from offensive tackle early in his career. Even after the position change, Lepsis saw most of his action as a blocker in CU's double-tight end alignment. Came into his own last season, hauling in 25 receptions, which more than doubled his career total to that point. With all the speed and big-play ability CU has at wide receiver with Rae Carruth, Phil Savoy and James Kidd, quarterback Koy Detmer needs a big, strong weapon like Lepsis to provide the offense with a different option. Lepsis runs pretty well for a big man, but what's most impressive is that last season he ranked as the Buffaloes' top-conditioned athlete.

9. FREDDIE JONES, 6-4, 251, North Carolina — Although a three-year starter with the Tar Heels, Jones isn't nearly as experienced catching the football as you might expect. Entering the '96 campaign, Jones had just 29 receptions, only two of which were touchdowns. Fortunately for Jones and the Tar Heels, they now have a quarterback in junior college transfer Chris Keldorf who can run their new pro-style. This means the passing attack has been more potent than at any point in Mack Brown's tenure as head coach, and in turn Jones will see the ball delivered his way with much more frequency. In their upset of Syracuse, Jones pulled in a key TD pass that showcased his impressive physical skills and NFL potential. If he puts together the type of senior year that's anticipated, you could see Jones make a huge move up the draft board.

10. JOHN ALLRED, 6-4, 245, USC — Now that Johnny McWilliams and Tyler Cashman are no longer with the Trojans, you would be led to believe John Robinson could be in trouble at this spot. Well, forget that. In Allred, the Trojans have a confident, sure-handed, strong blocking tight end who might lack McWilliams' athletic ability, but is still regarded as a fourth- or fifth-rounder who could ultimately develop into a starter in the NFL.

Here are the remaining TE prospects in order of their current grade according to my ratings:

Chad Lewis, 6-5, 238, BYU; Steve Bush, 6-2, 261, Arizona State; Patrick Hape, 6-3 1/2, 258, Alabama; Nicky Savoie, 6-5, 1/2, 240, LSU; Scott Pfeiffer, 6-4, 246, Tennessee; Keith Olsommer, 6-3 1/2, 245, Penn State; Josh Wilcox, 6-2, 247, Oregon; Bill Lingerfelt, 6-3 1/2, 242, Missouri; Ron Leshinski, 6-3, 243, Army; Jim Moore, 6-3, 245, Kansas; Ed Perry, 6-4, 237, James Madison; Darren Drexler, 6-5, 260, Northwestern; Pat Fitzgerald, 6-2, 231, Texas; Scott Richards, 6-4, 253, East Carolina; Mitch Jacoby, 6-4, 251, No. Illinois; Jessie McCovery, 6-1 1/2, 257, Auburn; Sean Bullard, 6-4, 228, California; Eric Boykin, 6-2, 221, West Virginia; Luther Broughton, 6-2, 242, Furman; Gerard Daphnis, 6-2, 247, Miami (Fla.); Grant Baynham, 6-4, 246, Georgia Tech; Hosea Friday, 6-1 1/2, 237, Kansas.

Editor's Note: Mel Kiper Jr. is nationally known for his in-depth views on the NFL draft and player personnel in the league. He publishes his own series of draft-related publications, is a part of ESPN's college draft team and his information is frequently published in USA Today.




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